

Bar Hoppin' With Hops

The Keep Calm and Hop On Tour
Hops MacBarley's Ongoing
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Hop #319

Halo Lounge (The Saint Hotel)

417 Eaton Street

Friday, July 12, 6:26 PM

Stella Artois (bottle) \$4.30

With work week done — thankfully — it was time to seek the peace and solitude of Duval Street. Hey, you have your solitude, I'll have mine.

I was on my way to The Lineup Bar (#303) to rendezvous with B&J. I hadn't talked with them, but it was pretty much a slam dunk that they would be there. As has been my wont since moving from the Shanty of Mid-Town to The Shed of Old Town (thanks, Irma), I chose walking over biking. It had been a pretty convenient bike ride from where I was all those years, but the current three-block wall to Duval is hard to beat. If I'm in a rush, I'll ride Trekko The Wonder Bike, but otherwise, the walk along Southard or Fleming is pretty damn chill.

So, I took the right onto Duval and began the downhill stroll towards the 200 block. On my left, though, I spied a gaggle of people up on the balcony of



The Saint Hotel. I heard something a while back about them using that space for something more than just the occasional gathering, but I did not recall hearing what the plan was. So, I wondered if my co-hoppers might possibly be up there.

Before my eyes could complete a scan of the white wooden railing, I heard Jan's voice from above, calling my name. That answered that. She and B were seated at a table on the rail. B waved me up, pointing around the corner of the building to the stairway.



I knew the way. We used to go to Pilar Bar (#250) pretty regularly, and B&J occasionally got rooms at The Saint Hotel when they lived out of town. They got me into a couple of guests-only shindigs up on this deck before, so I knew the lay of the land.

It was a mostly cloudy evening. That was a good thing. At this hour, the roof of the building did not cast a shadow over the deck, so 'twoulda been a tough sit in the hot late-afternoon sunshine.

The bar was bigger than I expected. It's permanent and solid, instead of the temporary rolling bar or skirted table that I had seen up here before. That



ended any doubt that I might have had about the legitimacy of this Hop. A half dozen high-top tables were spread out along the rail, and a lower table (with more comfy chairs) was to my left, under the roof. I deduced that that was the VIP table, once I saw the squad of notables seated at it. Discretion prevents me from revealing their identities. Ha. :P

As I reached B&J's table, I glanced aside and found myself swapping cheery greetings with Dustin, whom I've known since he was a middle schooler. I hadn't seen him much in the last several years, but I had gotten glimpse of his life via his mom's FB posts. He's a youthful-looking upper-20's dude with a great smile. Jan was stunned when I asked him the age of his oldest kid and he said "Six!" I mean, Dustin does still look 17, so her surprise was not unwarranted.

Dustin was on the job as a server up here, and he couldn't hang out long to chit-chat. I gave him a good-to-see-ya-again hand on the shoulder and came away with a dripping wet hand. "Ya," he shrugged with a smile, "I get kinda sweaty up here." He zipped off to attend to other patrons, and I settled in with me buds at their table.

It's a goodly view from here, overlooking the relatively tame 300 block. B&J have done the Fantasy Fest Parade from this deck. With nary a tree tall



enough to block the view, it's a top-notch spectator spot – and they charge admittance accordingly.

They also were up here for New Year's Eve – in fact, we did the street-to-deck hail thing that night too – but I'm not so zealous about that one. You look down on a steady two-way flow of people, but they are all headed to more interesting places – Sushi Drop up to the south at

Bourbon Street Pub (#100), Conch Drop down to the north at Sloppy Joe's (#68), some watering hole in between, or somewhere off Duval completely.

That's because nothing happens on the high end of the 300 block. The low end has Fat Tuesday's (#96) for an entertainment element (let's face it, half the joy of a second-floor overview is being able to look down and say, "Dammmn, check out *that* wasted dude!"), but the high end just has cigars, ice cream and Wendy's. Now, if you've ever been in this Wendy's, you know it's a trip-and-a-half, but not enough happens outside to



warrant a balcony view. It's too far away, anyway, to see much from here.



So, Halo's is a mellow view, suitable for yelling down to get a friend's attention to alert him to a fresh Hop, but otherwise, nothing special.

I hear there are some tweaks in the works for Halo Lounge – seating, hours, entertainment, whatnot and even some what-have-you – so this was kind of a trial period for them. I'm thinking evenings up here could be kinda nice. And Dustin's shirt might stay a little drier.